Deer and Mill Creeks Acquisition and Enhancement

II. Executive Summary

a. Project title: **Deer and Mill Creeks Acquisition and Enhancement**

Applicant: **The Nature Conservancy**

b. Project description and primary biological/ecological objectives

The Nature Conservancy requests $1,994,400 from the 1998 CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program for the acquisition, revegetation, and management of critical riparian and floodplain easements totaling almost 2,500 acres along the lower and middle reaches of Deer and Mill Creeks in the upper Sacramento River watershed. The total cost of the proposed project is $2,592,570. In addition to CALFED funding, The Nature Conservancy will also pursue funds from other public and private matching sources. The proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to restore and protect a continuous corridor of riparian, aquatic, and upland habitat along key tributary streams of the Sacramento River in eastern Tehama County, including Deer, Mill, and Battle Creeks. This proposal is being submitted for funding under the Floodplain Management and Habitat Restoration category.

The proposed project supports the objectives of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program by focusing on high-risk species and habitats and by providing broad ecosystem benefits. The primary biological/ecological and other CALFED objectives of this proposal are:

- To **protect and restore riparian and aquatic habitats** in order to maintain continuous habitat corridors along key tributary streams and their confluences with the main stem of the upper Sacramento River.
- To improve the **long-term sustainability of natural production of anadromous fish populations**, in particular spring-run, fall-run, and late fall-run chinook salmon and steelhead trout.
- To **retire flood-prone lands,** thus preventing economic losses due to flooding and reducing the likelihood of landowners building levees and other flood control structures which can constrain the natural channel meander and limit riparian vegetation..
- To **foster community support for habitat protection** and engage local landowners and students in restoration activities in order to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of ecological restoration.

c. Approach/tasks/schedule

The proposed project includes the acquisition of conservation easements on four key properties on Deer and Mill Creeks to protect existing and restorable riparian habitat. Each of the conservation easements will be purchased from a willing seller at a purchase price determined by a qualified appraiser. In addition, the project includes revegetation and enhancement activities on three of these properties; additional agreements with the landowners will be developed as necessary to implement the proposed revegetation. Start-up management activities for all acquired properties will include establishment of compliance monitoring for easement properties and the installation of fencing (as needed). Long-term management activities will consist of ongoing compliance monitoring of easement properties.

d. Justification for project

Deer and Mill Creeks support Sacramento River tributary ecosystems that are highly ranked in the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan and in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Anadromous Fish Restoration Plan. Protection of these two tributary ecosystems through acquisition and revegetation of key riparian and floodplain properties supports CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program objectives by protecting high-priority species and habitats, including **spring-run chinook salmon, steelhead trout, late fall-run chinook salmon, shaded riverine aquatic habitat and instream aquatic habitat.**

e. Budget costs and third-party impacts

The total request for funds is $1,994,400. This figure includes funding for conservation easement acquisition, revegetation, management, and outreach activities, as well as operations and endowment costs. This request represents approximately 75 percent of the total estimated project costs; we expect to match the balance, approximately $600,000, with funding from other public and private sources (see Section V). There are no known negative third-party impacts from the activities for which we are requesting funding.

f. Applicant qualifications

For more than ten years, The Nature Conservancy has worked with private landowners, public agencies, and the local watershed conservancies to coordinate conservation efforts on the upper Sacramento River and several of its tributaries. The Nature Conservancy has been active in the protection and enhancement of key habitat lands within the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge, on Deer and Mill Creeks, and at Gray Davis Dye Creek and Vina Plains Preserves.

g. Monitoring and data evaluation

The proposed project includes both compliance and biological monitoring components. Compliance monitoring will be designed and implemented on all easement properties to ensure that the terms and conditions of the easements are being met. Specific biological monitoring plans will be developed in consultation with CALFED. Biological monitoring will include monitoring of the revegetation sites for the three-year term of the project and could also include aerial photography of riverine habitat and channel meander in the lower reaches of the creeks, as well as monitoring plant survival and water temperature in the revegetation area. The Nature Conservancy will coordinate with ongoing monitoring programs in the project area, including the juvenile and adult spring-run salmon monitoring programs conducted by the California Department of Fish and Game.

h. Local support/coordination with other programs/compatibility with CALFED objectives

The Nature Conservancy has been working cooperatively with the local watershed conservancies on Deer, Mill, and Battle Creeks and with state and federal agencies. The proposed project is entirely consistent with CALFED objectives in that the project addresses the need to improve and expand aquatic and terrestrial habitats and upgrade ecological functions in the Bay-Delta ecosystem in order to support sustainable populations of diverse and valuable plant and animal species.